

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, March 3, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "DIET NEWS". Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Today I have a different kind of food news for you--some news about what city families all over our country are eating. I'm passing on to you some of the things that came to light when two nutrition experts analyzed the diets of typical American city families.

In this diet study Dr. Hazel K. Stiebeling and Esther Phipard, both of the U. S. Bureau of Home Economics, did something that has never been done before on such a large scale. They took the diets of 4,000 city families--families of employed wage earners and of low-salaried clerical workers, who lived in representative cities all over the United States. They took these diets--analyzed them--and measured them against present day nutrition standards.

They translated such items as carrots and potatoes--tomatoes and lettuce--pot roast--chocolate cake--into such terms as "energy values"--"vitamin values"--"protein values". And then they found how well these typical diets provided the food elements that have been found necessary to maintain good health.

Now Doctor Stiebeling and Doctor Phipard have put the results of their study into a circular published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Here in bound form the facts of the situation are available to all who are concerned with American food habits.

This publication should be of use to many persons and to many organizations. To mention only a few--there are the nutritionists the country over--all those who help to plan agricultural production--those who distribute food--those who plan programs to improve the public welfare. To all these and many others it is important just what the American homemaker sets before her family to eat.

And here are a few of the headlining facts revealed in this study of American city diets.

First--many thousands of American city families are not what nutritionists call "well-fed". Measured against present day standards of good nutrition, the diets of about half of these city families were found to need improvement.

Among the diet faults, two of the most striking deficiencies were in calcium and vitamin A.

Fewer than half of all these 4,000 families chose foods that would give them a "safe allowance" of calcium. However, this "safe allowance" gives a margin of safety above the average minimum requirements believed necessary for the building of bones and teeth and for some of the body processes. About 1 diet in every 6 was so low in calcium that it had to be rated poor.

3/3/39

As for vitamin A, a surprisingly large number of all the families did not get the generous allowance of vitamin A now recommended. And only about one-third of the families got enough vitamin A to fully protect them against "nutritional" night blindness. This nutritional night blindness is the failure of the eyes to adjust quickly from bright to dim light, or vice versa.

Another common diet fault was that enough vitamin B₁ was not provided. About half of these families selected foods that would give them a liberal allowance of this vitamin. Although there are many expensive sources of vitamin B₁, about 1 diet in 10 was rated poor because it was definitely low in vitamin B.

And as for vitamin C--or ascorbic acid--probably half of the families went without the generous daily allowance that nutritionists recommend. Ascorbic acid is the vitamin that is so often destroyed in cooking, and must be supplied daily because it cannot be stored in the body. One diet in 10 was rated poor because it was low in vitamin C.

Another deficiency in some of the city diets was iron. Only about half of the families could be sure of plenty of iron from the food they selected. One out of every 20 families had diets that were plainly short in this mineral, which is essential to the work of the red blood cells.

As to the reason that so many city diets fell down, Dr. Stiebeling points to two facts.

First, many of the families do not get adequate diets because they can't afford them. Families with only very small amounts to spend naturally bought largely of foods that satisfy hunger at low cost. Their diets often were one-sided and rated as "poor".

Second, families that had more money to spend for food had a better chance for getting well-balanced diets, for most of them bought more milk, eggs, vegetables, and fruits than the very poor families.

But plenty of money for food did not always mean good diets. And that brings up the second reason that many of the diets fell below standards of good nutrition. Some family diets were poor simply because of unwise selection of food.

This is illustrated by the fact that some homemakers managed to serve their families excellent meals--from the standpoint of nutrition--at very low cost. Others spent more, but made poor selections. In fact, out of every 10 families that had enough food money to get completely satisfactory diets only 2 to 4 made really wise selections according to Doctor Stiebeling.

And that's all the diet news I have time for today. Maybe some other day I can bring you more of the things that came to light when Doctor Stiebeling and her co-workers analyzed the diets of typical American city families.

#####

